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The Democracy Disease

Is Democracy Contagious?

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No company is preferable to bad, because we are more apt to catch the vices of others than their virtues, as disease is far more contagious than health.

- C. C. Colton

Remember that happiness is as contagious as gloom. It should be the first duty of those who are happy to let others know of their gladness.

- Maurice Maeterlinck

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Introduction

Democratization has become, over the last few decades, a primary research field for political scientists. Its aim – to locate the sources, causes and obstacles that play a part in the process of turning an authoritarian regime into a democratic polity. A growing group of scholars working within the field have turned their eyes to the theory of democratic diffusion, claiming that democracy's spread has a decidedly spatial factor – a reverse version of the "Dominoes Theory", previously propounding the threat of communist spread by cross-border contagion. "This metaphor dominated American rhetoric during the coldest phases of the Cold War, usually accompanied by maps on which a red stain would be spreading inexorably from some locus of communist power" (Starr, 1991). But with the fall of the USSR and the ensuing struggle of the liberated countries to catch up with the western world, the curious pattern of success and failure in that region, i.e., the tendency of countries closer to the west to do better than those further away from it, has spawned an (as yet small) pool of research on the subject.

This scholarly direction has also found resonance in the foreign policies of some countries, mainly the US. Following the war on Iraq, the US stated its hopes of succeeding in building a democratic regime in the liberated Iraq, which would then be a source for further democratization in the Middle East.

The current study attempts to take another look at this question, in search of evidence of actual cross-border contagion. The research done so far in the field mostly established that democracy and autocracy come in clusters and that these clusters tend to undergo processes of democratization and autocratization together. These findings, while in no way unimportant, fail to answer the likely criticism whereby these same

correlations may be attributed to other factors shared by the countries in each cluster, such as economic status, resources, education, religion and civic culture. Therefore, the claims of a direct influence of the democratic context in which a polity exists on its processes of democratization remain in doubt.

Oftentimes, the problem seems to be under-theorizing: the way in which democracy is supposed to be diffused to neighboring countries is seldom elaborated, and the importance of the spatial proximity over other elements such as similarity in resources or culture is therefore unclear. Indeed, some essays examine "universal" diffusion patterns, thus in fact doing away with the spatial factor altogether, while examining solely the temporal aspects of diffusion. Therefore, the question this essay seeks to answer is: *Do governmental transitions in neighboring countries have an effect on a country's own transitions towards and away from democracy, over and beyond effects caused by other similarities between those countries?* Or, to put it more bluntly, is democracy contagious?

Existing Research

The current wave of literature on spatial diffusion can be tracked back to Harvey Starr's 1991 essay "Democratic Dominoes". Starr, like many other scientists in this field, had previously studied the spatial diffusion of conflict, and attempted to carry the insights from those studies into the field of democratization. By doing so, he diverged from the then-common approach of case-studies and "requisites", and brought forth "a fundamental change in expectations regarding the impetus for change" – a largely *external* impetus (Bell and Staeheli, 2001). Starr divided the diffusion patterns into three types: global diffusion, a covariance of the entire system indicating "waves" of moves towards or away from democracy on a global scale; regional diffusion, being the tendency of clusters of countries to more or less uniformly adopt positive and negative governmental transitions; and neighbor effects, being the direct influence of adjoining countries on one-another by way of "contagion".

Starr purposefully selected the decade and a half *prior* to the emergence of the East European states from the ashes of the soviet bloc, showing the existence of diffusion on all three levels world-wide during the first part of the period Huntington (1991) termed as "the third wave" of democratization. Other students of diffusion focused on the post-communist world in particular (Kopstein and Reilly 2000), and yet others extended the scope to encompass the entire post-WWII period world-wide (O'Loughlin et al. 1998) or even the last two centuries (Gleditsch unpublished).

Global diffusion aside, the methods of determining the regional and neighborhood context of each case vary. O'Loughlin et al. state that "[i]n earlier studies of diffusion in international politics, comparison of different metrics has indicated the superiority

of the land border (or short sea distance) as the preferred metric" (1998: 554). However, in addition to the border-metric, they also employed a general "spatial lag" measure, allowing for growing circles of context, up to and including a "lag" spanning the entire world. In contrast, Gleditsch (unpublished) uses a 950-km threshold to determine the context-of-democracy area surrounding the case-country. Kopstein and Reilly (2000), who studied the post-communist world alone, measured context by distance from the West.

Despite these differences, results are generally similar. Starr (1991), basing his research on the Freedom House coding, found a nontrivial but fairly weak correlation between what he termed "bordering governmental transition treatment" from t_2 to t_0 and the presence of transition in t_0 . In his findings he states that the effect of bordering changes is greater for movements towards democracy. He also posits that "undergoing a BGT treatment has some effect "as a necessary condition on the diffusion of governmental transition at the neighbor level" (p. 374). O'Loughlin et al. (1998) have found a significant correlation between a country's Polity III score and the average score of its neighbors, with little difference between one spatial lag and nine. Curiously, the clearest difference from one spatial lag to the next is that between the first lag and the second *in favor of the latter* – that is, there was a higher correlation between a country's Polity score and the average score for those countries that are once removed from it.

However, referring to O'Loughlin et al.'s results, Gleditsch (unpublished) comments that "[m]erely attributing democratization or autocratization to some 'international context' ... explains little without clarifying the relevant context and some hypothesized mechanisms that influence the emergence of democracy" (p. 3). Indeed, theoretical explanations of the mechanism behind spatial diffusion are often

vague. Starr (1991) mentions that "[a]ny notion that events in the external context alter the willingness of governmental elites, nongovernmental elites, or broader segments of the population toward governmental transitions must be based on how the external events alter incentive structures for the actors involved". Gleditsch goes an extra step in explaining how this could work. His proposed mechanism is based on the theory of democratization as proposed, e.g., by Tatu Vanhanen: "power is used as a currency or as an intervening mechanism in the political struggle for scarce resources. People and groups struggle for power to obtain scarce resources ... If the resources used as sources of power are concentrated in the hands of one group, the same group will be the most powerful group. If the resources used as sanctions are distributed widely among several groups, it is reasonable to expect that power also becomes distributed" (1997: 23). Gleditsch then goes on to suggest that such struggles can go beyond the boundary of the state, and that the balance of power within a country can also be tipped through external events and outside actors. However, nowhere is it explained why a spatial diffusion explanation should be favored over a simpler dichotomous foreign involvement variable. Furthermore, it is not clear why one should necessarily expect the influence of a democracy's involvement in another country to pressure that country to become democratic – examples of democracies aiding dictators (e.g., Pinochet in Chile) or helping to sustain non-democratic regimes (e.g., Israel's relations with apartheid South-Africa) abound in the literature. Finally, in a world dominated by global super-powers and regional powers, there is no reason to assume that geographic proximity would be a good indication of international involvement either way. If anything, the proposed mechanism should favor regional diffusion explanations, and not those of neighbor effects. As Peter Gould put it, "simple geographic distance is not always the strongest influence in a diffusion

process, for some ideas and innovations seem to leap over many intervening people and places" (cited in Starr, 1991).

Methodology

To reiterate the question this essay seeks to answer: *Do governmental transitions in neighboring countries have an effect on a country's own transitions towards and away from democracy, over and beyond effects caused by other similarities between those countries?* To achieve this goal, this paper will attempt to pit different types of diffusion one against the other to locate the most likely source of most of the explanatory power of spatial diffusion theory. This factor will then be pitted against one of the most salient variable for "domestic" influence on democratization – GDP per capita.

Since diffusion requires, by definition, a temporal aspect, the basic unit of analysis for this study would be the state transition year – the sample will include every country-year during which a governmental transition took place,¹ in the post-WWII era (1946-2002), excluding island-states which have no borders with other countries. This unit was preferred over the entire universe of country-year cases because of the relative rarity of governmental transitions (only 970 cases out of a total of 7170 country-year cases in this period). Including the cases where no transition took place would most likely make the rejection of the null-hypothesis nigh impossible.

The three types of diffusion to be examined will be defined as:

- A. Global diffusion – the correlation between the average democracy score of the entire system and the case transition at t_0 .
- B. Regional diffusion – the correlation between the average democracy score of the region and the case transition at t_0 . The regions defined for this purpose, while geographically continuous, are also defined by social and cultural

¹ The sample does not include state creation and state demise years.

connections between the countries within. Therefore, for example, Mexico is a part of the South American region, and not the North American one. In the same vein, northern Africa is considered part of the Middle East, and not part of the Africa region.

The regions used are:

1. North America (US and Canada)
 2. South America (including all countries south of the US-Mexico border)
 3. Western Europe (including all the European countries which were not part of the soviet bloc, plus GDR)
 4. Eastern Europe (stretching into Asia and including all the countries in the former soviet bloc)
 5. Middle East (including northern Africa)
 6. Africa (sub-Saharan)
 7. Asia (excluding the former soviet bloc and Middle East)
 8. Oceania
- C. Neighboring countries diffusion – the correlation between the average democracy score of countries sharing borders with the case country and the case transition at t_0 . Another variable to test the neighboring countries effect calculates the average of transitions which have taken place in neighboring countries between t_0 and t_{-10} , weighted for temporal distance from the transition case.²

All democracy scores will be operationalized as the revised Polity score in the Polity IV dataset. This dataset uses two 10-point scales – democracy and autocracy –

² $T = \sum (S_i / (t_0 - Y_i + 1)) / N$

Where S_i is the total of the transitions which have taken place in neighbor i between t_0 and t_{-10} ; Y_i is the year of the last transition to have taken place in neighbor i ; and N is the number of neighbors which have undergone transitions between t_0 and t_{-10} .

and combines them to form a 21-point scale of democracy, ranging from -10 to 10. The Polity IV dataset allows for a more fine-tuned measure of governmental transitions than the second most popular dataset for diffusion research – the Freedom House freedom rating (Bell and Staeheli 2001).

This choice, of course, is not devoid of problems and qualifications: as Bell and Staeheli (2001) mention, the Polity dataset is a strictly procedural measure of democracy: its scales are based on institutional dichotomous factors, and no place is reserved for considerations of *substantive* democracy. The Freedom House data is only slightly better in this regard: while large efforts are put into researching both institutional and freedom factors, the final result still relies heavily on institutions and procedures. However, while this fault must be kept in mind while perusing the results of the current research, it is hard to imagine a genuine alternative measurement which can get over this hurdle.

Finally, to measure the diffusion effects against domestic explanations of democratization, I will use GDP per capita information from the World Bank's World Development Indicators 2003 data. Following Gleditsch (unpublished), the actual variable will be the natural logarithm of the GDP per capita figures, as "[m]any suggest that differences in GDP/capita probably matter comparatively more at lower levels of per capita income" (p. 15).

It is my hypothesis that the most salient influence would be that of the regional context. The reason being that cultural and social factors shared by the different countries in a region (as defined here) are far more influential than the direct influence of immediate neighbors, which constitute only a part of the cultural context of the case, as well as global trends which face greater "barriers" in influencing the different polities than the more culturally-similar region.

Findings

Our sample consists of 490 country-year cases. The Polity scores for these cases cover the entire range of -10 through 10, with a mean of -1.02. The transitions represented by these cases vary from -18 to +19, with a mean of 1.08. The average number of neighbor states in this sample is 3.68 and ranges between 1 and 14.³

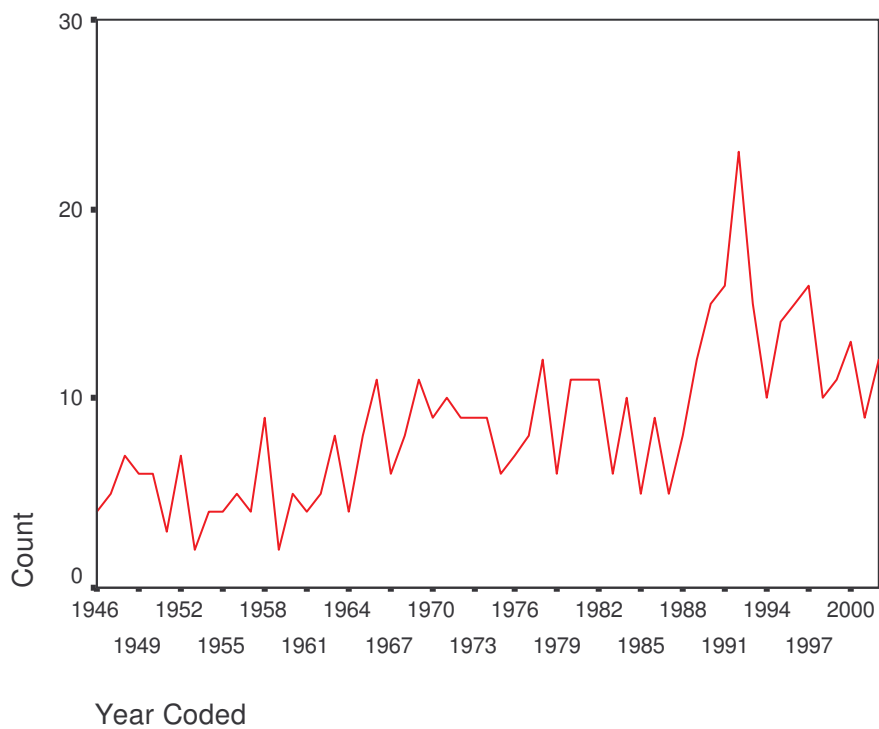
Table 1: Descriptive statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
Revised POLITY Score	490	-10	10	-1.02	6.47	-1.482	.220
Number of neighbor countries	490	1	14	3.68	1.97	3.147	.220
Transition: Change in POLITY	490	-18	19	1.08	7.28	.287	.220
Valid N (listwise)	490						

The transition years are distributed unevenly throughout the years. Of the 490 cases, nearly 39 percent of the transitions (191 cases) have occurred in the period between 1989 and 2002 (25 percent of the years in the sample period). This can be explained by the increase in the number of countries within the system during that period (140 countries are coded in 1988, and by 2002 the number rises to 160), however, an even greater growth in the number of countries between 1959 (91 countries) and 1970 (131 countries) only accounts for 79 transitions (16% of the sample) over a period of 10 years (nearly 18% of the sample period).

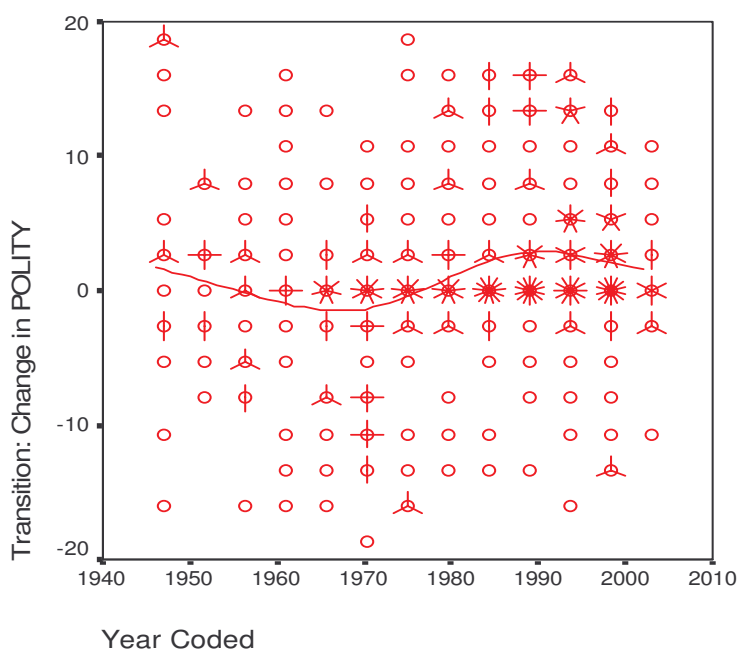
³ As earlier mentioned, countries with no bordering neighbors were removed from the sample.

Figure 1: Distribution of cases by year



When examining the types of change throughout the years, we can see a clear increase in the number of high positive transitions during the last two decades of the century. However this increase does not lessen the number of negative transitions in those same years compared to previous periods.

Figure 2: Changes in Polity scores throughout the sample years



Also visible in Figure 2 are the waves of democratization (the second starting after World War II and ending in the early 1960's, and the third beginning in the second half of the 1970's and possibly ending at the turn of the century⁴) and the counter-wave of authorization (mid-1960's through mid-1970's) (Huntington 1991). A Lowess fit-line also shows these waves quite clearly.

Table 2: Distribution of cases by area

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
South America	128	26.1	26.1	26.1
Europe West	19	3.9	3.9	30.0
Europe East	43	8.8	8.8	38.8
Africa	135	27.6	27.6	66.3
Middle East	87	17.8	17.8	84.1
Asia	78	15.9	15.9	100.0
Total	490	100.0	100.0	

The distribution of cases among the different areas is also uneven. Two of the defined regions – North America and Oceania – are empty groups. A third, Western Europe, counts for a mere 4% of the sample, while South America and Africa each account for more than a quarter of the sample. This distribution emphasizes the differences in stability between the western world and the "southern", or third, world.

When correlating between the two dependent variables and the four diffusion variables (global, regional, average neighbors' score and average neighbors' transitions), we can find a significant correlation between the two dependent variables and all of the independent variables – and indeed, even among the dependent variables themselves (Table 3). This is far from surprising, as once we have

⁴ A previous, first wave of democratization began in the US in 1828 and ended in 1922. This wave, too, was followed by a counter-wave culminating in the second World War.

established some level of global diffusion, it is only reasonable that there would be a high correlation between the entire system and any subset thereof. However, the regional average variable stands out as the strongest correlation with both dependent variables. When looking at the case's Polity score variable, the average polity score of neighbor countries variable comes a strong second ($r=.450$), but the strong correlation between the two independent variables ($r=.717$) hints at a high probability of overlap.

Table 3: Correlations

		Revised POLITY Score	Transition: Change in POLITY	Average Polity score in entire system	Average Polity Score in Area	Average Change Proportional to Time	Average Polity score of neighbor countries
Revised POLITY Score	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.603**	.288**	.549**	.215**	.450**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	490	490	490	490	490	490
Transition: Change in POLITY	Pearson Correlation	.603**	1.000	.164**	.246**	.164**	.135**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000	.000	.003
	N	490	490	490	490	490	490
Average Polity score in entire system	Pearson Correlation	.288**	.164**	1.000	.457**	.258**	.366**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000	.000	.000
	N	490	490	490	490	490	490
Average Polity Score in Area	Pearson Correlation	.549**	.246**	.457**	1.000	.366**	.717**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.	.000	.000
	N	490	490	490	490	490	490
Average Change Proportional to Time	Pearson Correlation	.215**	.164**	.258**	.366**	1.000	.404**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.	.000
	N	490	490	490	490	490	490
Average Polity score of neighbor countries	Pearson Correlation	.450**	.135**	.366**	.717**	.404**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.003	.000	.000	.000	.
	N	490	490	490	490	490	490

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Indeed, when pitting the two one against the other in a multiple regression analysis (Table 4), the regional factor proves far more significant, with the neighboring countries variable adding less than one percent to the explained variance.

Table 4: Multiple regression for Polity score

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.555	.308	.305	5.39

Predictors: (Constant), Average Polity Score in Area, Average Polity score of neighbor countries

Coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B		Beta		
(Constant)	-5.449E-02	.254		-.215	.830
Average Polity score of neighbor countries	.143	.067	.116	2.146	.032
Average Polity Score in Area	.751	.087	.465	8.605	.000

Dependent Variable: Revised POLITY Score

A similar analysis for the Polity change variable yields even more decisive results, with the neighbor countries score coming out insignificant at $p=0.177$, and contributing a mere 0.3% to the (already low) explained variance (Table 5).

Table 5: Multiple regression for Change in Polity score

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.253	.064	.060	7.06

Predictors: (Constant), Average Polity Score in Area, Average Polity score of neighbor countries

Coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B		Beta		
(Constant)	1.465	.332		4.412	.000
Average Polity score of neighbor countries	-.118	.087	-.085	-1.352	.177
Average Polity Score in Area	.558	.114	.307	4.880	.000

Dependent Variable: Transition: Change in POLITY

Similar multiple regression analyses were carried out for the other two independent variables, and their results are summed in Tables 6 and 7. All in all, the regional average Polity score remains the most salient and decidedly significant variable in all tests. Results were also similar when the sample was limited to only substantial positive transitions (Polity change > 2; $r = .50$ for regional diffusion and Polity score, $r = .315$ for regional diffusion and change in Polity, both significant at $p < 0.001$) or only substantial negative transitions (Polity change < -2; $r = .423$ for regional diffusion and Polity score, significant at $p < 0.001$, no significant results for the change in Polity variable).

Finally, a new dummy-variable indicating whether or not the country borders a different region than its own was added to the regressions, and was found insignificant.

Table 6: Multiple regression for Polity score

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.550	.303	.300	5.41

Predictors: (Constant), Average Polity score in entire system, Average Polity Score in Area
Coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B		Beta		
(Constant)	-.157	.253		-.621	.535
Average Polity Score in Area	.851	.069	.527	12.400	.000
Average Polity score in entire system	.159	.145	.047	1.098	.273

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.549	.301	.298	5.42

Predictors: (Constant), Average Change Proportional to Time, Average Polity Score in Area
Coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficient	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficient	t	Sig.
	B		Beta		
(Constant)					
Average Change Proportional to Time					
Average Polity Score in Area					

	s		s		
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-.171	.270		-.634	.527
Average Polity Score in Area	.876	.066	.543	13.339	.000
Average Change Proportional to Time	4.986E-02	.125	.016	.397	.691

Table 7: Multiple regression for Change in Polity score

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.253	.064	.060	7.06

a Predictors: (Constant), Average Polity score in entire system, Average Polity Score in Area
Coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.491	.330		4.517	.000
Average Polity Score in Area	.392	.090	.216	4.381	.000
Average Polity score in entire system	.252	.189	.066	1.334	.183

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.259	.067	.063	7.05

Predictors: (Constant), Average Change Proportional to Time, Average Polity Score in Area
Coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.298	.352		3.688	.000
Average Polity Score in Area	.390	.085	.215	4.564	.000
Average Change Proportional to Time	.297	.163	.086	1.822	.069

Having done away with alternative diffusion explanations, we can now turn to domestic factors, namely – the natural logarithm of the GDP per capita. Table 8 shows the correlations of the GDP variable with all previous variables. Given the large place awarded to GDP in the literature on democratization, the result of $r=0.239$ seems disappointing. It is especially curious when compared with the same correlation

over the entire Polity IV dataset, where $r=0.522$. This discrepancy shows that our sample represents a unique set of cases from the entire country-year universe, and strengthens the claim that governmental transformations take place at special points in time and in response to actual changes in the environment where the countries operate, as opposed to claims such as that of Przeworski and Limongi (1997), stating that transitions to democracy are initiated and carried through solely by the will of "political actors pursuing their goals" (p. 177) and cannot be predicted. It is interesting to note at this time that the correlation for GDP with the Polity score *prior* to the transition is even lower: $r=.181$.

Table 8: Correlations for LN of GDP per capita

		LN_GDP	Revised POLITY Score	Transition: Change in POLITY	Average Polity Score in Area	Average Polity score in entire system	Average Polity score of neighbor countries	Average Change Proportional to Time
LN_GDP	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.239**	.058	.279**	-.115*	.198**	.098
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.268	.000	.028	.000	.063
	N	363	363	363	363	363	363	363

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 9 shows the GDP multiple regression analyses for the two dependent variables along with the regional diffusion variable. While GDP fairs better than other diffusion variables for the Polity score variable, adding a full 2 percent to the explained variance, it is still far less significant than the regional diffusion. Furthermore, GDP completely fails in predicting the change in Policy scores. As an aside we may suggest that this result indicates that higher GDP per capita levels are a *result* of democratization, rather than a cause for it, however such hypotheses overstep the scope of this paper.

Table 9: Multiple regression analyses with LN of GDP per capita as predictor

Dependent Variable: Revised POLITY Score

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.566	.321	.317	5.38

Predictors: (Constant), LN_GDP, Average Polity Score in Area
Coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B		Beta		
(Constant)	-3.131	1.723		-1.817	.070
Average Polity Score in Area	.861	.073	.535	11.822	.000
LN_GDP	.492	.249	.090	1.981	.048

Dependent Variable: Transition: Change in POLITY

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.211	.045	.039	7.21

Predictors: (Constant), LN_GDP, Average Polity Score in Area
Coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B		Beta		
(Constant)	1.587	2.310		.687	.493
Average Polity Score in Area	.385	.098	.211	3.938	.000
LN_GDP	-4.072E-03	.333	-.001	-.012	.990

Discussion

The findings presented above reveal a gap in the existing research on diffusion, unexplained by current theory in the field. The U shape of the correlations between growing circles of diffusion and moves towards or away from democratization hints that there is more to diffusion than the mere geographical spread of authority systems like the spread of an inkblot on paper. The theory propounding democratization's spatial diffusion, according to the data supplied here, should be reconsidered. Hints at such findings could already be found in the literature, e.g. O'Loughlin et al.'s (1998) previously mentioned result showing that the second spatial lag is actually better correlated with a country's own democracy score than the first lag, which represents its immediate neighbors. The relative failure of the Average Transition in Neighboring Countries variable in predicting governmental transitions in this study also indicates that the presumed mechanism which propels spatial diffusion – that of external "cues/prototypes/models" (Starr 1991) – is very likely *not* the mechanism behind spatial diffusion.

How, then, can this obvious spatial correlation be explained? What mechanism creates clusters of democracies and autocracies in such a way that a regional effect is in fact stronger than that of immediate neighbors?

Further research is required to come to any definite conclusions, but some leads can be found. The relative success of the regional factor, despite the crude division of the world into areas according to general social and cultural links, suggests that the cause for clustering of regimes lies in the clustering of other factors that have not been examined in this paper. The list of suggested causes for democratization is indeed very long (Vanhanen (1997) attempts a summary of this literature), including some

scholars (e.g. Huntington 1991) who claim no single cause or group of causes can be located. Few, however, have shown substantial proof for their theories. The current study could suggest a method of isolating those clustered factors that promote or discourage democratization.

A study could be constructed, utilizing more advanced statistical methods than the one used for this study, which would try to locate the boundaries of regions so as to achieve maximal correlation with the democracy scores of the countries within them. Once the regions are identified, their social, economic and cultural properties can be analyzed, similarities between separate regions with similar democracy scores could possibly be found, and an altogether more well-grounded theory could be devised from those findings.

One must keep in mind the flaws inherent in this current study. First and foremost is the use of a strictly procedural operationalization of democracy, particularly as the conclusions point at a social and cultural impetus for democratization. Another potential problem lies in the simplistic statistical models applied in this study – the use of simple means and regression analyses – which may have diminished the visible effect of some of the variables employed. Finally, the choice of sample might have skewed the results. The small place afforded to the western world within the data could mean that some factors were not given due consideration. However, it is hard to think of a way around this problem in a study which seeks to examine actual cases of governmental transition.

Conclusions

The current study is but a preliminary "proof of concept". The methods and data used cannot possibly account for the full scope of the field being studied. However, what results we have suggest quite strongly that hopes for the contagious spread of democracy from some "Patient Zero" may be false. If this finding is corroborated by further research, it could have implications for the west's foreign policy (particularly the US). The recent attempt of "sowing" democracy in Iraq in hope that the democratic regime will then diffuse to the rest of the Arab world, for example, would be a mistake according to the current data. The democratization of Iraq is almost sure to fail because of the democratic context of the Arab world, rather than "infect" neighboring countries with the democratic "germ".

Certain mechanisms of regional diffusion are left to be discovered: How does regional context influence a country's governmental transitions? What sorts of barriers guard those countries at the edge of a region from the influence of neighboring regions? And, as far as foreign policy is concerned, what measures are required to break these barriers down and introduce democracy into a resisting region? These questions remain to be answered in future studies.

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